

Waifs and Wanderers 1: One Girl in All the World

by FuryouMiko

Category: Halo

Genre: Adventure, Romance

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2007-05-04 04:48:12

Updated: 2007-08-14 23:13:28

Packaged: 2016-04-27 00:13:00

Rating: T

Chapters: 11

Words: 8,849

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Inspired by the video Haloid Monty Oum. Spartan 458 encounters the wrong kind of Hunter. From there, things may develop...

1. Chapter 1

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie. One Girl in All the World is an OCRemix of the Metroid ending theme by The Wingless.

* * *

>Spartan 458 couldn't suppress a grin. The super-soldier was currently racing through the city in a borrowed Warthog with several contact mines rattling around in the passenger seat. Clad in Mark V Mjolnir armour, the Spartan couldn't feel the wind, but orders were orders. Sector two was being held by a large number of Covenant troops after the local defence force had been wiped out in the initial rush. The mission? Clear them out and hold the area until reinforcements could arrive.<p><p>

Well. A platoon of PDF troopers hadn't been able to hold the sector, so this could get exciting. Reports said that there were at least two massive Hunters in the area. That was what the mines were for. The Spartan's favourite shotgun was clipped to the passenger side dashboard, and a machine pistol was strapped to each hip. Two semiautomatics were hidden inside the armour plating, but hopefully they wouldn't be needed.

458 gunned the engine as the road came to an end ahead. With a roar of four-wheel-drive rage, the Warthog leapt from the edge of the ruined bridge. For long moments, it seemed to hang in the air before rubber kissed concrete. The Spartan had miscalculated, however, and the massive form of one of the Hunters was mere meters from the front of the IFV. No time to dodge, 458's mind raced, calculating probabilities and trajectories. Several plans came to mind, but by

far the most satisfactory was the one carried out. Spartan 458 gunned the engine again, squeezing two extra clicks from the poor vehicle before releasing the wheel to grab the shotgun. As the Warthog slammed into the Hunter at well over a hundred kilometres per hour it started to flip forwards. 458 crouched in the seat before springing with genetically enhanced might to jump over the Hunter even as the mines detonated, ripping the shotgun free of its clips and somersaulting. The second Hunter came into view, just where 458 had predicted it would be. The Spartan finished the somersault and landed both booted feet heavily on the Hunter's helmet, crouching and bringing the shotgun up to fire it point-blank into the huge alien's unprotected face. The shot ripped through even that creatures' tough hide, all ten lead pellets ripping through the skull and out the other side to collect in the back of its near impenetrable helmet. Before either body had a chance to fall, 458 sprung backwards, flipping again to land feet-first on a Jackal, crushing it.

For a moment, 458 regretted the loss of the Warthog's machinegun as the rest of the Covenant turned, unfriendly. Half the purple cruiser above must have been emptied for this assault. Ah well, nothing for it. The Spartan reached up and plucked several grenades free before setting the fuses and throwing them like shuriken into the shell shocked mass of alien invaders. Fragmentation detonations followed, creating confusion but also galvanising the Covenant troops into action. They immediately started to return fire, plasma bolts filling the air in a killing zone. 458 dodged, ducked and weaved to avoid being barbecued by the burning energy, but even so several struck the Mjolnir's shield. The shotgun was no longer the correct weapon for the job, and was quickly shouldered to be replaced by the twin machine pistols. Without bothering to aim, 458 ran sideways, squeezing the triggers on both weapons. The magazines were empty in seconds, but reloading was just as fast. 458 was glad that Spartan training involved reloading box magazines one-handed. The super-soldier continued to lay down suppressive fire with one pistol even as the other was replenished. 458 didn't know how many Jackals or Elites fell from the cavalcade, but eventually, the reloads ran out first. Time for a change of tactics.

Sheltering behind a ruined wall for a moment, 458's scanners showed that the area was still swarming with hostiles. The firefight and grenades had already halved their number, but the odds were still unfavourable. 458 was glad of the older shield built into the Mark V. The Mark VI may recharge faster, but in a protracted firefight, the heavier shield still had its advantages.

Discarding the machine pistols was an easy choice, and 458 grinned again at the familiar feel of the shotgun. Nothing had quite the same satisfaction as cutting an enemy in half at point-blank range with the 10-gauge. Most powerful shotgun in the world, for all the 12-gauge was standard military issue. The wall at the Spartan's back was starting to get hot from the plasma fire being poured into it. Time to move.

Rolling out from behind cover, 458 stayed low. The Spartan did the last thing the Covenant expected - ran straight towards them. It cost them precious moments to re-aim, and by that time the Spartan was among them. 458 used armoured fists and boots as much as the shotguns' butt and shells, each strike breaking bone (or chitin in the case of some of the more alien member races), each shot shredding an alien or knocking back an energy shield. 458 was a whirling

dervish of death and martial skill. Even as the shotgun was fired one-handed, its wielder grabbed a belt of grenades from a fallen foe and activated them, scattering the deadly packages around generously.

As 458 reloaded the spent box magazine again, everything fell quiet. The Spartan looked around for the Hunter the jackals and elites must have parted for only to realise that the square was deserted. The Covenant forced had been wiped out.

Something clattered nearby, bouncing twice like a tin can tossed to the ground. 458 looked around for the source of the sound. In the exact centre of the square was a large orange and red sphere. It looked similar to the contact mines used to take out the first Hunter, but larger. The sphere was about two and a half feet across. It rattled, then started to glow. A moment later, it unfolded in a flurry of mist and dust to reveal...

2. Chapter 2

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>As she unfurled from her Morph Ball, Samus Aran scanned the area carefully with her eyes. Dead cultists littered the ground around her, most of them looking to have died from blunt trauma of some kind. Whoever had caused this massacre was clearly a master of unarmed combat. She'd followed the reptilian pirates a long way, and she'd only been slightly surprised to see that there were some who did not follow the same path of death and cruelty that most she knew did. The creatures she'd taken to calling pirate cultists had allied themselves with several other races and created a mostly peaceful empire in this reach of space.<p><p>

Except, of course, when it came to the humans. It didn't matter if they were normal space pirates or enlightened cultist space pirates, they still wouldn't rest so long as one human breathed, it seemed. Well, that suited the bounty hunter just fine.

Finally, her eyes came to rest on the single living creature on the battlefield. Presumably the perpetrator of the massacre, the figure wore dull green power armour with a gold, mostly opaque visor. Samus couldn't make out the face behind the visor, but the numbers 458 were stencilled on the armours' shoulder. Apparently a human warrior, but her scan couldn't penetrate its energy shield to be sure. It was also raising the gun in its hands as though to shoot her. The scan told her that it might not be vulnerable to her beams, but it was worth a try. Raising her arm cannon, she aimed. Both weapons fired at the same time, the plasma ball destroying the lead shot before speeding through the space the green-clad warrior had stood only moments before. 458 rolled to his feet and racked the slide on the shotgun. Samus didn't have a lot of experience with solid-shot weapons outside her own rocket launcher, but it seemed likely that if she was caught by that thing at point-blank range, it could do some damage. The two armoured warriors circled each other, wary, anonymous. The green armour, soaked in alien blood and fluids, and the red-and-gold armour, clean and resplendent. To the part of Samus that was still

human - not taken in too deeply by the unfeeling mask of the bounty hunter - that still appreciated poetry, it was as though their small fight was representative of the eternal battle between purity and corruption.

The warrior moved forward, suddenly, firing the shotgun twice. Samus avoided the first scatter, and felt her armour absorb the second. In return, she loosed off two burning bolts of plasma even as she jumped away, the thrusters on the back of her armour kicking in to boost her away. She saw that the enemy had done much the same, shield absorbing the second plasma bolt and using the force to push away from the meeting point. 458 discarded the shotgun in favour of an infantryman's Battle Rifle, probably left over from the first assault. A machine pistol lay near it, and as Samus fired another shot the warrior rolled away, scooping up a machine pistol in the other hand. Then they were back to circling, though this time both fired their weapons as they strafed, Samus using minimum power to increase her rate of fire. The two streams of death crossed in midair, neither striking to any noticeable effect. The warrior discarded both guns to roll and grab another abandoned infantry weapon from its dead wielder, this time something far more potent. A rocket launcher. The weapon was crude and primitive compared to her own, but even so it was dangerous. Switching her own weapon over, she raced forward to close the range, activating her speed boost module and almost seeming to teleport across the square. The two warriors met in midair, grappling as each tried to get the enemies' weapon away. Rockets flew in both directions as trigger fingers were crushed against their weapons, but eventually the stronger of the two won. 458 threw Samus to the ground, and seemed ready to finish the job when Samus shifted to Morph ball, laying three mines. At the same time, the mines blew the bounty hunter up and away and knocked the other flying.

Samus shifted again in midair, reaching out with the grapple beam to snag onto an upright and spin herself around it before using the momentum to launch herself feet-first towards the other warrior. Smashing into him feet-first threw the warrior backwards, and in a moment of inspiration she hit him with the grapple beam, picking him up and tossing him through the air. The warrior hit a building, but seemed to flip heels over head and get on top of the building even as half the face fell in.

In defiance of all probability, a falling girder struck a dead drop ship on the way down, flipping it into the air...

3. Chapter 3

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>Spartan 458 grimaced in pain. That manoeuvre had been harder than it looked in the training manual. But now whatever god looked down on genetically engineered super-freaks was smiling as the Pelican drop ship rose into the air between them. Activating the boost modules in the Mjolnir's legs took only a moment. If the new Covie armour could use environmental weapons, so could Spartan 458. Jumping, the Spartan twisted in the air to plant both feet against the bottom of the

Pelican and shoved. Twisting again, 458 activated the jet-assist units on the back of the Mjolnir armour to follow the transports' last flight, taking the last two Covenant plasma grenades in hand. Even as the Pelican was destroyed by a shot from the covie's arm cannon at full power, 458 primed the grenades and plunged through the fireball to plant the bombs directly onto that gold chest plate. Using the last part of the thrust in the boost pack, 458 span to land upright, even as the Covenant warrior jet packed away. At the apex of the gold armour's leap, the grenades detonated, throwing it off trajectory and back into a building. Wary of any tricks, Spartan 458 moved closer to verify the kill. The covie's armour was falling apart, damaged beyond cohesion by the blast. As the dust settled, 458 caught glimpses of a blue bodysuit... then the most beautiful woman the Spartan's short life had born witness to stood up and shed the rest of the red and gold armour. And the blue-eyed, blond valkyrie looked seriously pissed off. <div>

4. Chapter 4

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>As Samus picked herself up, she couldn't help but growl. She hadn't started this fight. Now, that stupid, green-armoured number had destroyed her beloved Varia suit. It would take weeks to repair the suit, and almost as long to calibrate her enhancements to let her summon the new armour.

Reaching into the ruins of her cannon, she pulled out the plasma core and trigger unit, glad of the modifications made the last time the suit had been inoperable. The gun wasn't as powerful without the focussing rings and beam modulators held in the barrel of the cannon, but it still had some functionality. Activating the beam sword cast a yellow glow over her features that she'd been told made her look quite demonic, which was perfect for her purposes. The green armour was backing away slowly, but Samus had found too much respect for this enemy to think it was fear. Her enemy was too strong to find this intimidating.

Samus leapt forward, bringing the sword around in a wide, horizontal arc. The enemy warrior with 458 stencilled onto its shoulder did one of those improbable backwards rolls and came up with a pirate cultist energy sword in each hand. They exchanged blows back and forth for a moment, parrying and blocking strikes with lethal speed, 458 being forced slowly back by Samus' longer reach. Eventually, she drove the green-armoured warrior back against a wall. Then, disastrously, 458 caught Samus' blade between the two prongs of one of the energy blades and twisted it, sending the yellow plasma sword spinning away. Samus was forced to back flip away before sprinting for the sword. Rolling like her enemy would have, she scooped the sword up and reconfigured it hurriedly before snapping off several shots from the plasma pistol, forcing 458 backwards and damaging its shields. Not giving the enemy a chance to recover, Samus sprinted forwards, jumping into the air and landing on the warrior, knocking it back so that it tripped on the steps and fell back. Now sitting astride her fallen foe, Samus raised the plasma sword above her head, ready to bring it down on her enemy...

The light glinted off the golden faceplate, suddenly, blinding her. She expected the enemy to use the chance to throw her off, but the green-suited warrior just lay there as though waiting for the inevitable. Come to think of it, the warrior hadn't fought back much since she'd lost her Varia suit...

Samus leaned forward, overcome by curiosity. If she could just get the right angle, she'd be able to see through that gold helmet visor... there. Her breath caught in surprise. Behind the mask was not the large, vicious traitor to mankind she'd expected to see. Instead, the angelic face of a girl, barely looking old enough to wear the armour she did lay there, eyes closed against her fate and a small, beatific smile on her face...

5. Chapter 5

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>458 felt the concrete cracking, then looked up in time to see the valkyrie raise her golden blade. She allowed herself a smile as she closed her eyes to try and keep the image of that shining angel unsullied by her impending death.<p><p>

The strike never came. Something hissed in the corner of Spartan 458's ear, then the angel was gone, her weight lifting away from 458's chest. Opening her eyes, 458 rolled over to see four Covenant Banshees coming towards them on a strafing run. Beside her, the angel's sword flashed, deflecting plasma bolts away. 458 grabbed the first weapon that came to hand, a Covenant plasma rifle, and started returning fire, ducking and weaving to avoid the Banshees' shots. The first two banshees went down easily, but then the gun overheated... 458 dropped it, hissing in pain, then an idea came to her. Running over to the angel, she offered her hand. A savage grin crossed the blue-suited girl's face, and she stepped up into it. 458 gave her a boost, and the swordswoman did the rest, leaping into the air and activating the rockets in her boots to angle herself in the air. She brought the sword around, increasing the power to it to make the blade longer and swept it through the air twice. Each stroke carved a low-flying jet bike in two. Cutting the power to her boots, she flipped in the air and landed in a crouch. More infantry were swarming into the square now, and all of them were Covenant.

458 again grabbed the first thing that came to hand, hoisting the heavy weapon as though it were a pistol and bringing the gatling to bear. The angel landed at her back even as the Covenant surrounded them, deflecting shots with her sword even as 458 laid down a withering barrage from the chaingun. The two warriors broke apart as a squad of Jackals with shields rushed in, the angel moving to deal with them even as 458 moved to get something at her back so she couldn't be blindsided. Her foot kicked against something, and she grinned to herself before firing some rounds at the shielded Jackals. She hefted the sniper rifle in her other hand and dropped the chaingun to give the angel the thumbs up as the swordswoman noticed the way the shots ricochet off the shields.

The angel grabbed two of the shields and threw them down the length of the square. 458 took careful aim, then fired. The shots bounced between the two shields, decimating the Covenant column as they swarmed into the square, but despite the horrible carnage it caused the Covenant kept on coming... Again, her eyes met those of the angel, and wordlessly they communicated. They ran towards each other, the angel reaching the centre of the square first and slamming her sword grip into the ground. A glimmering dome of energy formed as the ground spread the power, the Covenant shots bouncing off the impromptu shield as 458 dived inside it, reaching over her back to the last resort. They couldn't hold this square, but the forces swarming into it were a massive part of the Covenant invasion force. She took the self-destruct unit built into the Mjolnir V's backpack and set the fuse before taking the angel's hand. As the shield failed, they ran across the square to one of the two Banshees 458 had destroyed. Even as the angel kept back the covenant with her sword, 458 kicked the jet bike into action and powered it up. The weapons and shields were shot, and it only had one stabiliser array left, but it would still fly. Just. She span the jet bike around and extended a hand, snagging the angel's as they rose unsteadily into the air, skimming along just out of reach of a Hunter that had finally arrived in support of the rest of the force.

The bomb detonated behind them, the Banshee's engine straining to keep them ahead of the blast wave even as the angel swung herself up behind 458. Then the front caught them, tossing them through the air like a tsunami tosses ships. 458 blacked out as they crashed on the remains of an aerial roadway.

6. Chapter 6

***"I thought I was the only girl in power armour... **

...with the weight of the world on her shoulders"*

7. Chapter 7

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>Samus didn't realise that the girl was awake until after she'd said it, but then she smiled as she realised she didn't mind if the girl had heard her.<p><p>

"Welcome back, four five eight." She said, her voice soft. Apart from the occasional externalised thought, she didn't have much cause to use her voice.

"How did you..? No, of course the angel of death would know my designation..." The warrior groaned as she sat up and removed her helmet, shaking out short, brown hair. "I expected hell to be less... earth like though."

"That's a new one for me, I've been called a lot of things, but never 'angel'." Samus chuckled to herself. "My name is Samus Aran. I'm a bounty hunter, and you're not dead. What's your name?"

"A bounty hunter?" 458 blinked "Oh. I'm sorry. I'm Spartan 458, petty officer second class, UNCS Marines. Are we secure?"

"There's nothing moving. Your bomb took out their ship, and a few of your drop ships showed up a couple of minutes ago. I don't think they're in any hurry to chase us down... Wait, you don't have a name?" Samus blinked. It was the first time in a long time that something had surprised her. "So what should I call you?"

"Petty Officer is what most say. You can call me Nicole if you want." She smiled, shyly. "Though it doesn't really mean anything.. It's what they called me before I was given a number."

"Nicole, then. Here, let me help with that first." Nicole was trying to take off her armour, but she must have been wounded in the fight or the crash because she was fumbling the catches. Samus moved forward and helped her, lifting each piece away and laying it down carefully until the Spartan was wearing just her back under suit. It was amusing to note that despite the differences in their armour, both women wore roughly the same thing beneath - a skin-tight, tear-resistant layer that both cushioned their skin against the armour and let them interface completely with their suits' systems. Under 458's Mjolnir armour was a powerfully built woman with a stunning physique even most marines would kill for.

"Thankyou" Nicole smiled again, then staggered Samus moved to catch her. The weight of the larger woman forced her back two steps until she was leaning against the wall, supporting 458's weight with her hands on her shoulders. "I couldn't fight you... once I saw." She whispered in Samus' ear before she put her arms around the blond, hugging her close. "I'm sorry it took so long for me to realise that you weren't one of them."

"N-no, that's okay... It was an honest mistake, even if I am still a bit annoyed that you destroyed my suit." Samus stuttered, blushing inexplicably and as surprised by the Spartan's actions as the other girl seemed to be. Hesitantly, she hugged back. "Are you okay? You're a bit unsteady." She asked after helping Nicole stand again.

"I'll be fine. I'm just a little sore... and maybe a bit dizzy..." This time, 458 caught herself, putting a hand out to rest against the wall. "The healing factor will take care of it. I just need to sit down for a minute... And maybe have something to eat..." Turning, she put her back to the wall and slid down it slowly.

"Is there anything you could eat in that?" Samus asked, pointing at the pieces of power suit still laying where they'd dropped them.

"Ugh, Military rations" Nicole grimaced, but nodded "Yes, there should be. In the chest armour, liquid rations" She tried to stand up, but Samus pushed her back down with a disapproving look.

"You, Petty Officer Second Class Nicole Four Five Eight, are not going anywhere until that dizziness fades." Samus told her, scowling. "I'll get the drink." With that, she stood and went over to the armour, searching the breastplate for access. Eventually she found it, and flipped the cover open to find a mess of wires and tubing at least as complex as her own Varia suit, if less efficient

or effective. Finally settling for ripping the plastic bag out of the surrounding attachments, she brought the transparent container over to Nicole and offered it to her. Inside was a blue liquid that looked as appetising as the Spartan had described.

"Thanks" It was Nicole's turn to blush without explanation now as she took the bag and sucked thirstily at the scrap of tubing left at the top. After a moment, she offered it to Samus, who smiled at her and took a long drink before pulling a face.

"It really doesn't taste good, does it?" She grimaced, and Nicole chuckled.

"I think it's to stop us getting distracted by the drink in the middle of battle. Though I did hear that 117 managed to get beer in his once. Him and his technician both swore it was an accident, but you know Marines." Nicole grinned again. "By the way, what's a Bounty Hunter doing out here? And how'd you get that kind of technology? It's beyond even what I've seen the Covenant using, and they've got some scary stuff."

"My foster parents gave it to me. When I was three, my parents - they were miners - were killed in a pirate attack. The Chozo - Choujinzoku, to give them the name they call themselves - took me in when they realised what had happened. I was chasing some pirates when they went into hyper drive. I followed them, something went crazy on my scanners, then the next thing I know those religious fanatics were demanding my unconditional surrender and the pirate ship was fleeing. I ducked into the atmosphere to avoid their attacks only to find myself in the middle of a ground war." Samus shrugged, sitting down next to Nicole. "I hid my ship in a blocked tunnel, then you know the rest."

"Where are you from, then? Wait, 'Religious fanatics'? You don't know who the Covenant are? Where have you been for the last two years?"

"All over the place. Between the Federation and the Chozo, I've been pretty much everywhere."

"How come I've never heard of this Federation, or these Chozo, then?" Nicole was confused. "The only two forces I know of are the UN and the Covenant, and the Covenant certainly aren't friendly."

"That's odd..." Samus started, ready to tell her about the Federation, Space Pirates, the Chozo and Metroids. She didn't get the chance to finish, however, as 458 keeled over without warning. "Damn. She must have been worse off than I thought, and without my suit there's no way to scan her..." Samus muttered to herself. The nearest medical help was with the UNCS forces spreading through the city below, and they had no way to get down until someone found them, the stairs having been destroyed. '_Well, at least it's just the humans down there now. The ship should be fine..._' She decided, tapping a few controls on her wrist computer - the only thing apart from the sword that she'd managed to salvage from the wreck of her armour - to wake Adam up and summon the ship to her. There was a rudimentary medical centre in the ship, and hopefully it would be up to the task of diagnosing what was wrong with the Spartan.

8. Chapter 8

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>458 groaned as she woke up. She was disoriented at first, until she recognised a medical bay. Still, that didn't mean she knew where she was.<p><p>

"Welcome back... again." Samus' voice, she recognised eventually. Finally, she remembered the circumstances that had brought her here. "You should have told me you were feeling sick, Nikki." The Hunter paused, then covered her mouth. "Nicole, sorry." She paused to gather herself before continuing. "You had a concussion. If I hadn't been there, you could have drowned in your own vomit. You didn't recognise the signs?"

"No... Sorry... I didn't. It's been so long since I had time to refresh my first aid that I'd forgotten... Thank you, again, Samus. Where are we?" 458 tried to stand, but Samus pushed her back down gently.

"On my ship, in a UNCS base. The medics decided it was too dangerous to move you to a medical facility."

"They have standing orders not to admit any Spartan warrior to a non-specialist facility." Nicole grimaced. "They probably told you that to try and maintain the pretence that there were no cover ups in the UNCS." She paused, blinking. "What did you do to me? I feel like one in a million. I haven't felt this good since I recovered from my upgrade."

"Chozo medical tech. I know enough to fix it, but I couldn't tell you how it works." Samus shrugged. "Does not letting you into standard military hospitals have anything to do with this?" She waved an arm vaguely at a row of screens against the back wall, several of which showed diagnostic results indicating the patient's enlarged bone structure and muscle mass, among the other 'upgrades'.

"Yes. I guess you found out, huh? I'm not a regular human. I'm a product of the Spartan-II project. One of thirty two successful adaptations... Out of an initial selection of eighty five subjects. One of only six still marked for active duty. The others who survived the enhancement process are all marked as 'missing in action', which for a Spartan is almost always synonymous with 'killed in action'." She laughed, slightly bitterly. "Even if I am only borderline successful."

"Why not just mark the dead ones as KIA, if they were killed? And what do you mean borderline?" Samus asked, sitting on the edge of the bench Nicole was laying on.

"Spartans are unkillable. Everyone knows that. If one were to actually die, in battle, it would have a hugely demoralising effect on the rest of the troops." She paused before answering the bounty hunter's other question. "And I didn't take to the programming as well as the others. Too emotional, too hormonal. It was an 'acceptable' risk that some of us might turn out this way, but I'm

the only one who did without being crippled by the other possible side-effects of the treatments. Three of us went blind. The other cripples are dead."

"And these were acceptable risks? I'm not sure I like your UNCS very much, Nicole. What did your parents have to say about this?"

"My parents? Now that's an interesting idea. I have some half memories of people who might have been my parents, but as far as I know, myself and the other candidates were grown in tanks. If that's not the case, it wouldn't surprise me too much, but I must have been taken from them when I was very young." She sighed, and Samus realised she felt sorry for the girl on her medical table. At least she'd had the chance to know her parents, and the Chozo had filled in the gaps in what she remembered. They'd given her a good part of the purpose she had in life, and to be without that wasn't something she wanted to imagine.

"Well, maybe I can find them for you. I've been known to do missing persons in the past" Samus offered with a smile.

"No... I don't think I want to know. If they exist, the government will have come up with a cover story to explain my disappearance. I trust them that far - they're generally good at lying. Can I sit up yet?" Nicole looked so pitiful suddenly that it made Samus chuckle to herself even as she nodded.

"Just sit, though. If you pass out again, I'm going to be even less happy than those ONIs who came to verify your identity." She told the super soldier, sternly. "They want you to go and make a report in person as soon as you wake up, by the way."

"Ah, Damnit. They'll want to know why I had to detonate the bomb and everything. They'll be really annoyed, I'm in so much trouble." 458 put her head in her hands.

"Anything I can do to help?"

"No, I'm fully accountable. And this so soon after that mess with Melissa." She groaned as though she couldn't believe her luck.

"Melissa?" Samus asked, raising her eyebrow.

"A ship AI I worked with for a while. I was aboard Nassau station when the Apocalypso 'fell' out of Slipstream right on top of it. Usually the sort of thing you encounter once in a lifetime - right at the end of it. But no, nothing could be that simple. Ended up thrown backwards in time five hundred years or so. Melissa went mad, rejected her spider routine and infested the internet, and I got stuck guarding the station as the only living survivor."

"How did you get back?" Samus asked, intrigued. The thought had struck her that something similar might have happened to her - this world was too different to hers for it to be contemporary.

"Eventually, Melissa recovered herself and returned to the ship. She managed to close the rift, or it closed on its own... The accepted version is that she closed it, but she told me that she didn't

actually do anything. Closest she can figure out is that when all the components were in place again it snapped back like a rubber band." Nicole stopped as she realised exactly what she was doing - spilling top clearance military secrets to a mercenary. "I should shut up now and go make my report. It was nice meeting you... I wish It had been under different circumstances." She stood up and looked for an exit.

"You have to go, huh? What do you think they'll do?" Samus caught her hand to stop her leaving.

"Probably disciplinary action of some kind. I don't really want to talk about it."

"Lady, I'm detecting a pirate cruiser coming out of hyper transit in low orbit." The toneless, vaguely male voice seemed to come from everywhere.

"Thankyou, Adam. Seal the ship and prepare for takeoff. Open a channel to UNCS command for me, too." Samus replied, before looking at 458. "Looks like you got a stay of execution. Sometimes, even pirates have good timing. Now I just hope it's not too late..."

"What can I do to help?" Nicole asked, taking her hand back.

"Nothing. I know it's against those warrior instincts of yours, but you're going to stay right here until I get back. Strap yourself in."

"What are you going to tell the navy?"

"That I'm going to deal with that ship, to leave me to it, and that you haven't woken up yet. That takes all responsibility for getting off away from you." Samus grinned. "If you do decide to 'wake up' while we're up there, don't follow me. You don't have any armour, and I don't have a gun I can give you."

"Lying to them isn't a good idea, Samus. I hope you know what you're getting in to."

"Don't worry, I'll be fine. I could knock you out again if it would make you feel better."

"No, that's not necessary." Nicole grimaced, and Samus laughed musically before leaving.

9. Chapter 9

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>Samus grimaced to herself as she waited for the lock to cycle. Usually, she'd be out of the ship and blasting her way in by now, but with the loss of her Varia suit she was limited to mortal means. And that meant boarding charges.<p><p>

Finally, the light went green for go. The hatch opened, and she ran through it, bringing her sword up to deflect the pirates' initial volley. They were waiting for her, of course - they would have detected her ship attaching itself minutes before the charges went off.

Now that she was faced with her enemy again after two months of not actually seeing a pirate in the flesh, she realised that while some of the Covenant did look a little like them, most of the member races were totally different. In fact, it was pretty much just the flying bugs that looked like the beetle-like pirates.

She wasn't as fast without the suit, and she couldn't blast them with such ease, so it took a little longer than usual but eventually the pirate welcoming committee was wiped out. A voice chattered over the ship's intercom, but again, without her suit's translation algorithms she could barely understand a fifth of the aliens' language. Something about boarders, though she couldn't tell if it was plural or singular. It seemed likely that a surviving Covenant drop ship or a platoon of UNCS troops might have attacked the ship, either to hijack it and escape or capture whatever technology they brought. That just made Samus' mission all the more important. She had to reach the key locations before either other group could.

The bridge first, she decided. Take out their commander and get the ship up into high orbit where it could be safely disposed of. From there, she could set the self destruct and get to the second objective more easily.

Moving through the ship, she couldn't help but grimace at the smell and general state of things. How regular humans could survive in this toxic atmosphere, she didn't know - the Chozo's gift let her metabolise the poisons more quickly, but even she would have to suffer if she stayed here too long.

More pirates were in the way, she realised, and she activated her sword again before charging into the fray...

The first clue she had that she wasn't alone after that was when she found a group of pirates already killed. A quick examination of the bodies determined that they'd been killed by ballistic weapons, which ruled out the Covenant. She didn't have the time to waste to do a full analysis of the battle, but it looked from a glance like the pirates had been killed by a single person, and there was definitely something familiar about the boot mark in one pirates' chest plating. It wasn't quite the same as Nicole's, but it looked like there was another Spartan in the area. Of course - a normal Marine wouldn't survive in here, but the Spartan armour included a full environment suit.

Her rival had beaten her to the bridge, and was currently in combat with a pirate dragon. It wasn't Ridley - she was fairly sure she'd killed him for the last time - but it was still an impressive creature, three times the height of a man with wings that would fill the bridge if they were spread. The Spartan was duelling the creature, avoiding blasts from its flaming breath and strikes from its claws to return fire with the rifle in his hands. This Spartan had newer armour, from the look of things, but his little gun wasn't doing much damage.

Silently, Samus slipped into the room and moved around the edge until she managed to get behind the dragon. Its attention was still focused on the Spartan - she saw his number, 063 - and hadn't noticed her yet. With calculated force and satisfying maliciousness, she activated her sword and brought it up and over before slicing the dragons' tail off. The creature, suddenly unbalanced, toppled over forward and the Spartan wasted no time darting in close to shove a frag grenade up its nostril before jumping back. Moving around, Samus looked up at it warily as it reared back, going cross-eyed to try and see what 063 had done.

A moment later, its head exploded, splattering both warriors with gore. Samus grimaced in disgust - the stench was even worse than that of the beetles, and she couldn't escape it since it was on her. Not to mention trying to get the fragments of bone and brain out of her hair. This job was so much more survivable with a full environment suit.

"Who are you?" The Spartan's voice was male, but that didn't necessarily mean that he was. "Are there many more of these aliens?"

"Probably a lot, but that doesn't matter. I'm Samus Aran, the bounty hunter. Your sister is on my ship, safe. Let me sort this out and then we can ditch this wreck." She walked over to a console, her fingers flying across it. She was unaccustomed to having to work through the pirates' keyboards, so it took a little longer than it could have, but in a few minutes she'd set the self-destruct. "It's on a fifteen minute fuse. I have one more thing I need to do, but you should get off now if you've got a shuttle."

"It sounds important. I planned to fly this ship down. I take it you just made that not an option?" 063 asked, sceptically.

"Quite. Follow me, then." Samus turned and took off at a run, the Spartan following her. They descended the levels quickly, the remaining pirates finding ways out eagerly. Samus was about to unlock a door when 063 gently picked her up and moved her sideways. She opened her mouth to protest, but he cut her off.

"I mean no offence, Huntress, but we don't have the time." The dull male voice told her, before pressing an explosive device to the door. He shielded her with his body, though the back-blast knocked out his shields.

"Men!" Samus muttered to herself as she ran into the room around the armoured soldier. Even when she'd been a marine - the brief, brief period before taking up bounty hunting as a better way of getting what she needed - she'd found the sexism involved in all military forces unbearable. The scene on the other side of the door was a mess. Fortunately, the prize was in tact and apparently unharmed. Samus hurried into the room and scooped up the unconscious thirteen-year-old girl before lifting her into a fireman's carry. "You clear the way. My ship is that way." She indicated, and the two warriors jogged through the pirate ship until they'd reached Samus' ship. She was inside the airlock when she heard the whine of a Pirate's rifle, several powerful plasma bolts lancing in through the open hatch and ricocheting off the mounting. She slammed the hatch shut just as Spartan 063 stumbled into the airlock and

collapsedâ€|

10. Chapter 10

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>"Samus! Paul! Are you..?" Nicole was waiting for them on the other side of the lock.<p><p>

"I'm fine, I don't know about zero six three, though. Check him while I make sure she's alright." Samus told her before taking the girl-objective through to lay her on the bed. Nicole did as suggested, and at first she couldn't find anything wrong with the Mk-VI clad Spartan, but then she found the hole. Driven neatly through the weak-point at the back of his neck, the weaker shields on the newer armour must have failed during the running battle on the way back to Samus' ship. Nicole felt a pang of regret when she realised that another of her family was dead. ONI would need to be notified, even if there were no gravestones for the immortal Spartans. While Samus dealt with her girl-child, she reckoned she had enough time to say goodbye.

Much as Samus had helped her, she set to work removing his armour. Each piece of the nearly intact Mjolnir suit was piled neatly just inside the ship, until Paul lay there in just his under suit. He looked so old, she mused. Where her own temporal adventure had shaved ten years off her age - her return had been delayed far longer than she'd experienced in subjective time - 063 had lived through each of the forty three years of his violent life. His once blonde hair was shot through with grey, and his almost cherubic face was lined with stress. The wound that killed him was entry only, so that from the front it looked like he was merely sleeping. Whispering a goodbye, 458 closed his eyes while drawing her hand, index and middle fingers extended, across her face in the sign language for 'smile' that the Spartan-IIs had adopted as their private greeting.

"He didn't make it?" Samus' voice, soft, from the entrance.

"Some kind of needle weapon." Nicole's voice was tight with suppressed emotion. She hadn't even known Paul had been on the planet, and now he was dead in front of her. "I'll have to tell ONI, even if no-one else ever finds out."

"I'm sorry." Samus said, moving forward. "I had a brother, too. The pirates killed him when I was five," she paused. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Take us up, into space. I'll send him into the stars, a proper Marine's burial." She paused to get her cracking voice under control. It hurt, much more than she was letting on, but she'd been trained to hold it a inside, to show no weakness that might demoralise the rest of the troops.

"Alright. Do you mind if I'm there? I owe him. If you wanted it to be a private thing, I understand, but..."

"No, I'd like it if you were there. I think he would, too." Nicole nodded "I need to post my report to ONI, I can't put it off any longer"

"Go on, then. There's a terminal in my cabin, you can use that. I'll take you to wherever their HQ is when we've seen Paul off?"

Nicole nodded wordlessly by way of reply before going through to write her report.

11. Chapter 11

Disclaimer: Samus Aran belongs to NinTenDo. Master Chief and the other thirty two Spartans belong to Bungie.

* * *

>Paul's gear had been moved into the corridor that linked the four parts of Samus' ship for the funeral, leaving the airlock bereft of any clutter except for the two women and the dead Spartan's shrouded body. Spartans were rare enough, but the Mjolnir-VI armour he'd been wearing was almost as valuable, and Nicole knew that she'd be in even more trouble than she already was if she flushed it into space with her brother-marine's remains.<p><p>

"Goodbye, Spartan zero six three. I'll buy you a beer next time I see you." Samus couldn't help but make the joke - it was so obvious that 458 needed it. Though she wasn't crying openly, the Hunter could tell that though Nicole appeared at least ten years younger than the forty-something Paul, it was obvious that they'd been very close.

The two women stepped back from the body and into the corridor, and Samus cycled the lock, flushing him serenely out into space. They stood at the transparent porthole for a minute before a soft click came from the speakers, Adam's equivalent of clearing his throat.

"There's something you should know, Lady. I'm detecting strange patterns in the slipspace matrix surrounding this and another vessel, similar to those observed while we prepared to chase the pirate frigate here." The computers' voice broke the silence with an almost embarrassed tone, as though it could understand the moment. "If we do not plan on transferring to hyperluminal travel in the near future, we need to translocate away from the affected area."

"Thankyou, Adam. Take us down into the atmosphere and prepare to land at the co-ordinates ONI gave us." Samus told him before putting her arm around Nicole and guiding her to sit on the edge of the bed. "Rest here for a moment, there's no..." The ship shook, suddenly, and she looked at the ceiling before demanding; "Adam, what was that?"

"Cause unknown, Lady. I must apologise, Lady. It seems that I was not rapid enough in our subluminal transfer." As the computer spoke, Nicole seemed to come out of her reverie and look at Samus.

"What's happened?" She asked, slowly. "My head hurts... like someone's crawled into it and thrown it through a slipstream tunnel."

Blinking, she looked at her hands. "No way. That's impossible..."

"What is?" Samus asked, looking at her with a frown. The shudder would have to wait. The hand looked the same to her - though, looking at 458's face, something had certainly changed.

"Have you got a pin? I need to check something." 458 paused while Samus found a knife and offered it to her.

"Will that do?" She asked, and Nicole nodded before pricking her finger. A small amount of blood welled up before the wound sealed itself.

"I haven't had that hand for five years. It's been a prosthetic since I lost it in a melee on Mars during an assassination attempt."

"That's odd. You look younger, too. Has anything like this ever happened before?" Samus frowned. She already had a sneaking suspicion of what had happened.

"No, I... no, it has, actually. After the Argo incident, when I snapped back to the present. Biologically, I'm ten years younger than the other Spartan-IIs. That would mean..." She looked up at the ceiling as it hit her.

"Lady, I'm receiving a primitive message signal. Should I patch it through to the intercom?" The computers' voice interrupted their thoughts.

"Go ahead. Who's calling?" Samus responded, then asked when the click of the comm indicated it was patched into the main array.

"This is Captain DuMorne of the Terran Dominion. Stand down and depower your shields."

* * *

>Fin.<p><p>

A/N: Well, that's it for One Girl In All the World. Waifs and Wanderers 2: Radio Free Zerg should be under progress soon. Thanks for being patient, and thanks for reading!

End
file.